CHRONICLE AND COMMENT

By ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE.

ALMOST simultaneously with the publication in this country of the Byron letters, discussed in this department of THE HERALD book section a few weeks ago, is the presentation in a recent issue of the *Bulletin* of the New York Public Library of certain extraordinary and hitherto generally unknown letters from George W. Eveleth to Edgar Allan Poe. After Poe's death his papers passed into the hands of his literary executor, Rufus Wilmot Griswold, who wrote of the poet with an irritation that was petty even if justified. Eventually Mrs. Griswold presented most of the Poe collection to the Boston Public Libraary and the letters in this collection, with a few exceptions, were published by Prof. Harrison in the seventeenth volume of the "Complete Works of Poe" in 1902.

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SIX years before the Harrison edition appeared, however, there had been sold at public auction by the Griswold family a series of letters to Poe from George W. Eveleth, a young and bumptious Maine man; that is, young in Poe's lifetime, and probably bumptious throughout his own lifetime. The whereabouts of these papers remained unknown until the autumn of 1920. Then Mr. Thomas Ollive Mabbott, who has edited them for the *Bulletin*, made a series of transcripts of the letters and presented them to the New York Public Library. Says Mr. Mabbott: "Eveleth was the first Poe specialist. Though he never met Poe he occupies a unique position among Poe's correspondents; he was an admirer, yet bold to speak his mind, and for his opinions Poe had no little respect." That, as will be shown, was astonishing. Poe's letters to Eveleth were preserved by the latter, and later communicated to Ingram, who printed large portions in his biography but without revealing the name of the recipient. It was Eleveth's well deserved fate to remain comparatively unknown. His name appears neither in the index of the Harrison "Life" nor in the index of the abridged Woodberry "Life," both at the moment before the writer of these paragraphs. The omission probably implies a natural disgust on the part of the biographers.

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IN Eveleth's first letter, written in 1845—that was the banner year of Poe's life, when he was able, in the short lived *Broadway Journal*, to revise and reprint, generally in more finished form, nearly everything that he had yet produced—he recalls the dislike with which he began to read Poe in *Graham's Magazine* in 1842. He writes: "I was highly pleased with . . . the passionate stories of Mrs. Stephens and the merry, skipping, childlike utterances of Mrs. Osgood. Yet there were some few productions which I met with that were not in much favor with me at first; and they were those of Mr. Poe, the editor of the magazine during the first six months that I took it. His criticisms, I thought, were sheer pedantries, and his tales very perplexities, very enigmas, which I could not unravel. His 'Masque of the Red Death' in particular, seemed a complete mystery. I could find neither beginning, middle nor end to it, neither design nor meaning."

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IN time Eveleth came to change his opinion. Mr. Poe became his especial favorite. In the same first letter he writes: "I am passionately fond of reading his productions of all kinds. His works of analysis, such as 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' and 'The Mystery of Marie Roget' whet curiosity to the keenest edge, forcing the very soul of the reader, in spite of himself, to every step and through every obscure winding of their course. But I rather prefer his—I is—nightmare tales to these—I know not what better adjective to use—for they cling, to my mind at least, in all the vividness and with all the shivering intensity of the nightmare. In 'The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion,' 'The Fall of the House of Usher,' 'The Descent Into the Maelstrom,' 'The Masque of the Red Death' and others there is a kind of undercurrent of something—I know not what—that comes up, faint at first, and dimly seen, but increasing gradually in strength and brightness, till it opens into a full ocean, surging and sounding and flaming. Each of them is a volume of metaphysics and a book of poetry."

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ALL of this in a direct letter to Poe, though it sounds as if a third person was under discussion. But into the panegyric of youth, unquestionably sincere in the mood of the moment, there soon creeps the personal note. Even a very young man does not allow his enthusiasm to run to page after page of manuscript without hoping for a reply from the object of his eulogy. Certainly not this canny Eveleth. For the personal note he paves the way craftily by expressing the wish that he could lay his hands upon the poems, "The Raven" in particular, and upon the "Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque." He has, he says, written to publishers in Philadelphia and Boston, but they do not have them. Then: "I wish Mr. Poe would 'stoop so low' as to address by letter a rustic youngster of the backwoods of Maine and tell him where he can get those things which he covets so much. Dickens condescended to write to an humble one in the wilds of our West: and the Lord of Life and Glory deigned to come down from his throne to suffer and die for sinful, fallen men. Will not Mr. Poe address me? I wish Mr. Poe would take upon himself the regulation of a magazine and stick to his work. I would even give him the little support of a subscription for it; that is, as long as I have the eyesight to read, the mind to appreciate and the money to pay."

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MUCH has been written in disparagement of Poe, but no one has accused him of not being very human in his vanities. There was about him in matters of this kind no British aloofness. Also Eveleth's communication suggested ready money. That first letter was dated December 21, 1845. Eveleth's second letter bore the date of January 5, 1846, and shows that Poe had written to him between the two dates. In the second letter there is an amazing change of tone. Eveleth is no longer a suppliant begging a word from the great man. In sending a check for $3 he assumes the attitude of a patron, the Mæcenus of Horace, or the eighteenth century nobleman to whom Grub Street dedicated its books. He is cockily critical. He does not like to see so many advertisements in the *Journal*. He thinks the price asked is too high. "Well, yours is of short standing, I see, and with sufficient encouragement from subscribers you may afford it at less cost by and by. I send you the inclosed $3 as my share of encouragement at present. Forward the *Journal* one year, commencing with the new volume. I guess you can afford to give me a little premium. If so, let it be some of your works. Any except the late collection by Wiley & Putnam." Could anything be more beautiful in canny impudence and callow conceit?

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YET the third letter is even more astonishing, in view of the tone of the first. Almost three months have elapsed since Eveleth's second letter, printed in this collection, and Poe has evidently been at his old tricks. Eveleth writes: "If you did not get the letter in which was inclosed $3 for your paper, why have you not let me know it, after having learned that I sent the money to you? Certainly it was your duty so to do, if not to satisfy me at least to clear yourself from the charge of knavery. You are liable to such a charge as the case now stands, for, as it is hardly possible that every one of the letters which have been sent to you (two by myself and one by our postmaster) miscarried, and as I have not heard a word from you, so it is probable that you have received them all, the money with them, and no thanks to me for it. The editor of the Philadelphia *Saturday Post*, speaking of plagiarisms (another kind of swindling) says "Mr. Poe, *late* of the *Broadway Journal*" so by this I suppose you are not connected with the paper now. Well, am I going to receive my money back, or anything in recompense? . . . Something I demand of you, sir, for those three dollars of mine in your possession, something in the same coin—that is, cash—or something in the shape of literature, or something in the shape of a notification to me that you are a poor devil, and that you beg the money from me to keep you from distress—and that something, whichever it is, with tolerable speediness."

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POE in his leanto in the outskirts of Philadelphia, Poe in his boarding house in Greenwich street, New York; Poe in Greenwich Village; Poe being hounded by his creditors of Broadway; Poe in his Fordham cottage with his dying wife, Virginia, shivering for the want of a coverlet; Poe finding his own death in a mysterious way in Baltimore—these are pathetic aspects of a tragic and gloomy life. But the uttermost depth of his degradation is plumbed in these letters. He swallowed what the miserable Eveleth wrote to him, and continued the correspondence.

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LAST week—May 21, to be exact—there was another minor literary centenary, that of Erckmann, the senior partner in the collaboration Erckmann-Chatrian, which was responsible for many novels and many plays, the best known of them to American readers and playgoers being "Le Juif Polonais," more familiarly "The Bells" of Sir Henry Irving's acting. With the exception of "The Bells" the popularity of Erckmann-Chatrian seems to have passed, although there was a time during the great war when an attempt was made to revive interest in translations of such books as "The Conscript," "Brigadier Frederick" and "The Blockade of Phalsburg." They were tales of Alsace and of war, and both war and Alsace were very conspicuous in the mind of the world. But the element of timeliness gone the works of Erckmann-Chatrian belong to the irrevocable past, as do the novels of G. P. R. James and Harrison Ainsworth.

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A WEEK or so ago there were paragraphs in this department about the suit recently started in Paris by the heirs of Auguste Maquet against the heirs of Alexandre Dumas. The literary partnership of Erckmann and Chatrian ended in an estrangement even more curious. In view of the prominent place that the collaboration once held in letters it is odd how little is known of the personalities of the two men or of the intimate details of their quarrel. One may look in vain in literary histories and encyclopedias under the caption Erckmann-Chatrian. Even in the great "Larousse" will be be found little more than a list of their principal works and a word of appreciation of their exceptional intellectual union. Where details have been found many of them have been flatly contradictory.

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BUT when Chatrian died in 1890 articles appeared in the Paris papers giving his side of the quarrel, and for many years that was the only side known. It was made accessible to English readers by Mme. Van de Velde in her "French Fiction of To-day," published in London in 1891. According to that book comparatively late in their careers several plays had been produced in Paris signed by the joint name, but of which Erckmann had not written a single word; Chatrian, assisted by some professional playwright, being the sole author. As long as the plays were successful Erckmann took his share of the royalties, but when they ceased to run he sent his nephew to Chatrian, who was broken down, with failing memory, and put in a claim against him. He objected to royalties paid to collaborators, and as an indemnity for past losses demanded the complete abandonment of Chatrian's right to the published "Edition de Theatre."

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MME. VAN DE VELDE went on to say: "M. Erckmann is thoroughly German; M. Chatrian is entirely French. The former lives at Phalsburg, among Germans, with a niece married to a Brunswick officer, receives the Governor of Lorraine, and has apparently forgotten that the Germans bombarded the town and burned his father's house. M. Chatrian resides at St. Die, on the French side; has reared his sons in the love of France, enlisted them at the age of 18 in French regiments; he occasionally crosses the frontier to visit his father's tomb, but has solemnly forbidden that his body be laid at his side 'as long as a German foot treads the ground of Alsace-Lorraine.'"

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CONTINUING the Chatrian side of the story, the outcome of the controversy was that Chatrian was persuaded to arbitrate and place the matter in the hands of a lawyer friend of the claimant. He was eventually informed of the final decision; he was required to pay out of his own pocket to Erckmann all the sums paid out to the various men who had helped him write "their plays." Either from weakness or kindheartedness he did not contest the result, but a compromise was finally reached by which he paid one-half of the amount claimed, or 22,117 francs, which made serious inroads on his slender resources.

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THAT was the story given out in 1891. Twenty years later the Emile Erckmann side was published in an article printed in a leading French review and entitled "The Truth About Erckmann-Chatrian." This article was professedly based upon a personal interview with Erckmann a short time before his death. In a measure it corroborates the earlier account, yet adds certain striking details tending completely to reverse sympathy. According to the later writer the relations between the two authors had never been properly understood. Erckmann had always been the patron and Chatrian the beneficiary; Erckmann the soul of the combination, the creative writer, and Chatrian the factotum, the agent, the man of business.

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THE acquaintance began when Erckmann was a law student in Paris. According to the later story one day he received a plaintive letter in verse from Phalsburg, in which the writer compared himself to a hunted stag brought to bay. When Erckmann returned to Phalsburg he hunted out the author, found him to be Chatrian and in a short time they were on terms of close intimacy and Erckmann had made it possible for his friend to go to Paris by settling upon him an allowance of 150 francs a month from his own slender patrimony. From that time onward for forty years Chatrian remained in the literary center, while Erckmann lived in Phalsburg and there wrote the stories which he sent on for Chatrian to amend and sell. That was the arrangement to the end. Chatrian transcribed the manuscripts, rejected certain passages, revised certain episodes, made terms with publishers and collected and invested the royalties.

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IN the course of years Erckmann ceased to write and Chatrian withdrew from Paris and went to live in St. Die. Then, according to the later story, came the need of a general accounting. In rendering the account Chatrian is alleged to have said: "We have always shared the royalties from our books. We must now share the royalties from our plays. These plays were all taken from the books with the aid of collaborators whom I have paid. The money paid to them should be deducted from your share, since you did not take part in writing the plays." To this Erckmann is said to have agreed. But serious errors, amounting to 22,000 francs, were found in the accounts. Chatrian, forced to revise by an arbitrator, is said to have lost his temper and to have given utterance to such phrases as "Prussian! To think that I have so long been collaborating with a Prussian! . . . When the Theatre-Francais posted the bulletins announcing 'L'Ami Fritz' he has no idea how I suffered at having my name coupled with that of a Prussian!"

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SOON after the break an article was published in the Paris *Figaro* signed by Georgel, Chatrian's private secretary. It called Erckmann a renegade and accused him of having played the buffoon before Prussian officers, singing the "Marseillaise" and dancing to it at the time of the siege of Phalsburg. Erckmann, added his last champion, brought suit and recovered damages. That he was not Prussian at heart was urged in the following words: "Three years before his death Erckmann was seized with an irresistible homesickness for his birthplace. But in revisiting Strassbourg he refused to be shown the new portions of the city, built since 1871. It was his old French Strassbourg that he wished to revisit. He observed that the children in the streets still spoke Alsatian. As for him, he had never learned German and congratulated himself on this ignorance, maintaining that the Berlin folk employed a wretched patois and that Alsatian was the true classic speech."

Authors' Works And Their Ways

Arthur Guiterman, author of "The Mirthful Lyre," "A Ballad Maker's Pack," &c. (Harper's) comments in verse as follows on his first experience last week at talking over the radio from the Westinghouse Receiving Station, Newark, N. J.:

"I Breathed a song into the air;
That little song of beauty rare
Is flying still, for aught I know,
Around the world by radio."

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Margot Asquith tells a new Mark Twain joke as follows: "Mr. Clemens . . . had taken me into dinner at the home of a namesake of mine . . . and had told me of a great American temperance orator who, having exercised his voice too much, had asked the chairman to provide milk instead of water at his meeting. . . . The chairman . . . put rum into the milk, and when the orator, pausing in one of his most dramatic periods, stopped to clear his throat he drained the glass, and putting it down exclaimed: 'Gosh; what cows!'"

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"Tramping With a Poet in the Rockies" is the title of a book by Stephen Graham, author of "Europe—Whither Bound," which the Appletons have just published. Vachel Lindsay is the poet in question and the volume forms a record of a tramp which Graham took with him in the Rockies.

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Francis Charles MacDonald, honorary secretary of the United States Embassy at Tokio under Roland Morris, 1917-1920, is the author of a book of poems, "Devices and Desires," to be brought out by the Princeton University Press early in June.

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Joseph Hergesheimer's stories "Tubal Cain," "Wild Oranges" and "The Dark Fleece" have been brought out in new editions by Alfred A. Knopf, each as a separate volume. These three stories were originally published in one volume, "Gold and Iron." The text has been revised and the type reset.

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In an interview at Washington the other day Dr. Walter E. Traprock, author of "The Cruise of the Kawa," gave out the first advance information concerning his recently completed tour to the North Pole. It appears that Traprock is lobbying at the capital to have whalebone put on the free list. He says that while in the North he discovered the corset trust is trying to put a restrictive duty on whalebone, so as to boost the price of corsets. "Defeat this plan," he says, "and the flapper problem is solved, for if corsets could be made cheap enough the flapper will resume wearing corsets and all will be well."